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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 000433

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GERMANO

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/23/2019

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SUBJECT: CEVIKOZ DISCUSSES TURKEY-ARMENIA-AZERBAIJAN
INTERPLAY

Classified By: Ambassador James F. Jeffrey, reasons 1.4 (b,d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Azerbaijan's concerns that Armenia will stiffen its negotiating position on Nagorno-Karabakh (N-K) if Turkey opens the border with Armenia are legitimate, according to MFA Deputy U/S Cevikoz. Armenia needs to be persuaded that relations with Turkey cannot be enhanced genuinely without steps on N-K; Turkey will propose economic incentives to help motivate all sides. The Turks believe President Aliyev is forward-leaning on N-K, demonstrated by his position on the political status of Lachin, even as specifics on the width of the corridor remain to be determined. Cevikoz forecast "shifting alliances" in the Caucasus that would emerge from Turkey-Armenia normalization; Russia will be content to see Azerbaijan and its energy resources drift toward it. Ambassador underscored the importance Azerbaijan attaches to using its gas to develop economic and political ties to Western Europe. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) MFA Deputy U/S Unal Cevikoz outlined for Ambassador March 20 how he believes Turkey can bring along both Armenia and Azerbaijan in support of Turkey normalizing relations with Armenia while gaining progress on resolving the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Aware that the Armenian Diaspora is accusing Turkey (and by implication Yerevan) of trying to split the Diaspora from Armenia, Cevikoz said he believed that Armenian President Sargsian had taken stock of the situation his people find themselves in politically and economically. Their creeping loss of sovereignty to Russia is a threat to the power of the ethnic Armenian leadership, and Sargsian has decided that Armenia needs to open up to the West. And that can only happen through Turkey. Genocide recognition, Cevikoz said he believed, is moving lower on the Armenian list of priorities, though it will always be there. The Diaspora does not care about the economic condition of the Armenian people, Cevikoz said.

¶3. (C) Cevikoz noted Aliyev's impressive showing in the March 18 referendum amending the constitution. He implied a degree of Turkish uncertainty concerning Article 101, paragraph 5, which not only lifts term limits, but also authorizes prolonging the presidency (i.e., without elections) in time of war (which Azerbaijan has been in with Armenia perpetually since 1993). If Aliyev can deliver on development, he will likely remain President for a long time. This may give him an opportunity to implement his vision for Azerbaijan. The question is: what kind of vision?

¶4. (C) Cevikoz said he finds Aliyev forward-leaning on N-K, pointing out that he has compromised in principle on the political status of Lachin. If he can reach his goal on the

ultimate status of N-K and the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan, and is confident Armenia will not challenge it, he will be flexible. The width of Lachin is also important. Azerbaijani Deputy FM Azimov said the Armenians want the entirety of Lachin province as a corridor. That is unacceptable to Azerbaijan, as it was ethnic Azeri territory. Cevikoz did not speculate on what would be a reasonable width.

¶5. (C) Azerbaijani concerns are legitimate: Armenia could become a tougher negotiator on N-K following a deal with Turkey, according to Cevikoz. As such, Armenia needs to be persuaded that this is a package deal, i.e., that relations with Turkey cannot be enhanced genuinely without steps on N-K. Existing, unofficial trade between Turkey and Armenia is about \$150 million per year. Opening the border will at best double that; it will not produce much of an economic bang for Armenia, at least not at first. Noting a fear in Armenia that the Diaspora will cut off financial support if it goes ahead on a deal with Turkey, Cevikoz proposed that Turkey offer Armenia economic incentives, though he offered few specifics apart from road-building. Turkey will seek to involve Azerbaijan in any such projects. Cevikoz predicted that the announcement/initialing of an agreement with Armenia -- which he said would happen very soon -- would trigger criticism from the Azerbaijani people. Turkey can deal with it in the short run, but will need to see developments on N-K and regional cooperation projects if it is to withstand sustained criticism. Cevikoz also suggested that Turkey play a more active role in the Minsk Group chairmanship process, but has not explored this idea with the French or Russians.

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¶6. (C) Cevikoz predicted the whole Caucasus would change following Turkey-Armenia normalization, forecasting "shifting alliances." The Russians view the development as a win-win. The present lack of relations between Turkey and Armenia, and the dominance Russia can exert over Armenia, suits Moscow fine, but if there is a normalization, then Moscow will be equally content with the damage to Turkey-Azerbaijan relations and expect to see Azerbaijan and its energy resources drift toward it.

¶7. (C) Ambassador underscored the importance of progress on an East-West corridor. Azerbaijan sees a way forward when dealing with the Turkish MFA, but not with BOTAS. Azerbaijan is not going to just give away its gas to Turkey, he stressed. Oil is economic; gas is political. The Azerbaijanis are getting squeezed by the Russians and the Iranians and desperately want to strengthen their ties to Western Europe. They are not as confident as Turkey, which is part of and has security guarantees from the West.

¶8. (C) COMMENT: Cevikoz's views represent the classic, sophisticated, hard-line, and zero-sum approach to such issues that characterizes the MFA bureaucracy. His seniors take a more flexible position, realizing that a Turkish-Armenian agreement is a political decision, that still has to be decided at the very top levels.

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Jeffrey